



## Beaver County Wants to Hear from You Public Participation Plan Survey

### SUMMARY REPORT

In November of 2021, Beaver County Council expressed an interest in seeking public participation regarding the following policies/program areas:

- Level of Service Overland Drainage
- Pest Control Level of Service
- Road Maintenance Level of Service
- Road Construction Priorities

Council recognized that good governance includes engaging County residents and municipal stakeholders and that there was a need for those stakeholders who are affected by a decision, to influence the decision. The areas chosen for discussion were based on Council direction and focused on areas where there has been concerns raised or a need for program clarification, which could have budgetary impacts.

Administration prepared a Public Participation Plan, following Council's Public Participation Policy, which outlined a number of tools that could be used to engage the public on these areas of interest. Unfortunately, due to the COVID pandemic, the scope of participation had to be limited and targeted so that as much information could be gathered in a short time frame. The time frame was also designed such that if there were any financial implications arising from the information gathered, which led to a policy or program adjustment, it could be incorporated in the 2022 Municipal Budget.

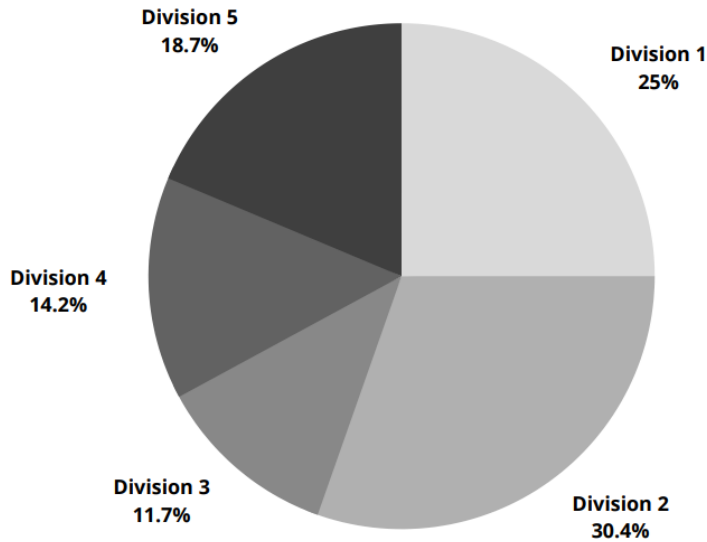
The proposed implantation of the plan was as follows:

| DATE                  | MEETING                | ITEM  |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---|
| December 1, 2021      | <i>Regular Council</i> | Public Participation Plan presented to/approved by Council                            |
| December 15, 2021     | <i>Regular Council</i> | Survey questions presented to Council for review                                      |
| January 5, 2022       |                        | Survey questions released for public participation                                    |
| January 19, 2022      |                        | Survey closed   |
| January 20 – 25, 2022 |                        | Administration to review input gathered and prepare a report for Council              |
| February 2, 2022      | <i>Regular Council</i> | Summary report provided to Council for review   |
| February 16, 2022     | <i>Regular Council</i> | Policy changes presented to Council, if required                                      |
| Prior to Final Budget |                        | Adjustments made to the appropriate budget(s) to reflect policy changes, if required. |

Once the Plan was approved by Council, survey questions were developed and reviewed by Council at the December 15, 2021 meeting. The online survey was created and released to the public for completion between January 5 – 19, 2022. Stakeholders could also arrange to receive a hard copy or emailed version of the survey to complete. Information regarding the Public Participation Plan was published in the Beaver County Chronicle, on the County's website, and through the County's social media profiles. An advertising flyer was also be sent inviting participation by stakeholders in the survey.

At the February 2, 2022 Regular Meeting of Council, Council was provided with an update on Survey completion and an initial overview of the multiple-choice responses. There were 370 survey responses received through the online survey with an additional 24 surveys that were submitted in hard copy form. Council also received a full copy of the survey with all of the written comments submitted by the public, in camera.

Of the surveys completed, 89% of the respondents were Beaver County residents in the following divisions:



Also, in order to examine the population demographics a little further, participants were asked to identify which sector of the population they represented with the following responses given:

- Acreage Owner 49 %
- Agricultural Producer 38.1 %
- Urban Resident 8.2 %
- Local Business 2.1 %
- Other 2.6 %

For those that completed the questions, the majority of respondents were in the age brackets from 31 – 60 years old. Administration also received feedback from residents on the length of the survey, accessibility of participation and the nature of information that was included for background.

With the survey results amounting to 110 pages in data, administration has prepared this summary report to provide a general overview of the information received and to highlight the trends that were identified by program area. Information gathered will be used to inform future decision-making regarding policy development, program design and allocation of appropriate resources.

**PROGRAM AREA: Water and Beavers**

*Beavers and Beaver Dams*

Beaver activity has the ability to damage, and at times destroy, municipal infrastructure and associated drainage works. This activity also has the potential to impact private property and agricultural producer's livelihood. The County has had a longstanding landflood control program to address the removal of beaver and beaver dams, with programs and policies developed for dealing with the beaver activity within the County boundaries.

From the survey, 43% of respondents agreed that the current budget of \$40 000, from property tax, was sufficient for this program. It was also noted that 69% of respondents felt that the County should only trap beavers if they are plugging culverts and that anytime the County is removing a dam or unplugging a culvert beavers should be trapped first.

As for beaver removal on private land 58% of respondents feel that there should be a fee applied for this service, with 33% of those respondents saying that the private landowner should cover the full cost of the service, if there is no benefit to a County road or threat to a home. If the County was to enter on private land for beaver dam removal, 65% suggested that this should be done proactively so as to protect a road from spring flooding or to move water out of the roadside ditch. When the County receives a request to have beaver dams removed on private land, with no benefit to the County, half of respondents said that the County should charge the full cost of the service. Interestingly, there was 27% of respondents that chose that the County should subsidize private beaver dam removal for residents, but not be doing the work.

The Beaver Bounty program has been an area where Council has received extensive feedback in the past and asked specific questions related to those concerns. From the respondent's answers there is mixed opinions about whether or not the County should pay landowners to trap or shoot beavers on private land, however 62% said that some sort of incentive should be used with 45% of respondents saying the current budget is reasonable.

*Drainage Structures (Weirs, drop structures, etc.)*

Beaver County holds water licenses on sections of various creeks and waterbodies within the County and generally these works are private land. There uses are varied however generally they help improve agricultural productivity and also to manage water levels to mitigate the impacts of seasonal drought and flooding. 48% of respondents thought that the County should remove beaver dams and clean out these ditches as a regular maintenance program, however 24% suggested that only the control of beavers and dams to keep water flowing would be needed.

Respondents also noted the following:

- 54% - When a structure reaches its life expectancy, it should be reviewed by an engineer and scheduled for replacement
- 45% noted that farm crossings for agricultural use on private land should be replaced by the landowner

Currently, there is no budget for this program and respondents had mixed feelings on how it should be funded with 43% saying no more than \$50 000 should be allocated annually. The largest percentage of responses for how the program should be funded were for a cost share maintenance and replacement program of these structures with the landowner, which could include a localized special tax for those that the drainage benefits.

Overall, additional comments provided by respondents, highlighted some common themes and opportunities around beaver and water management that included:

1. County taking a proactive approach instead of reactive when it comes to water and infrastructure protection
  - a. Maintenance is key to protecting infrastructure – need to set priorities and desired outcomes based on public interest
  - b. Emphasis should be placed on unplugging and replacing culverts as much is needed and resources should be directed to this function area appropriately
  - c. Operations, and budget, need to be flexible to deal with changing weather impacts from year to year (climate adaptations)
2. Issues related to beavers and their dams need to be looked at from a whole area approach
  - a. Beaver issues tend to be site specific – mapping and information gathering is key to identifying problem areas and impacts
3. Historical man-made infrastructure, such as ditching on private land, has created increased problems in the County road right of ways
  - a. Need for increased awareness and education about the impacts of draining on private property and the legislative requirements that exist
  - b. County could investigate what other local municipalities are doing in regards to this issue
  - c. County could advocate for assistance from the Province when built infrastructure such as rail lines and highways intersect and impact drainage patterns
4. Improve communication and cooperation with landowners when beaver dam removal occurs and water is released
  - a. Upstream and downstream impacts need to be considered before action is taken
  - b. Concerns between neighboring landowners may need to be facilitated by the County prior to work being completed
5. Investigation of other options/alternatives for beaver management is desired
  - a. Improve education and awareness of the benefits of maintaining wetlands on the landscape
  - b. Incorporate tools, such as co-existence measures, into maintenance planning
  - c. Work with external organizations, academia and grant opportunities to implement best management practices

Across the County it is apparent that issues surrounding water and beavers are a priority for stakeholders and continued communication on this topic is needed. Respondents are also looking to cooperate with the County to ensure that effective and efficient solutions can be achieved that benefit everyone.

**PROGRAM AREA: Regular Road Maintenance**

Beaver County maintains its roadway infrastructure, of approximately 2600 kilometers, to a standard which is appropriate for its intended purpose and within a responsible fiscal framework.

Respondents were asked to provide feedback on various road types and the level of maintenance standard for each as outlined in the County’s Road Maintenance Level of Service Policy. The following table is a summary of responses for each road type.

| Type of Road   | Acceptable Level of Service | Increased Level of Service | Decreased Level of Service | No Preference |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Resource Roads   | 66.45 %                     | 15.79 %                    | 2.30 %                     | 15.46 %       |
| Main Collector Roads   | 66.99 %                     | 22.88 %                    | 2.61 %                     | 7.52 %        |
| Minor Collector Roads  | 68.20 %                     | 21.31 %                    | 3.28 %                     | 7.21 %        |
| Local Roads  | 65.90 %                     | 24.92 %                    | 2.95 %                     | 6.23 %        |
| Machinery (or Field Access) Roads  | 66.89 %                     | 6.89 %                     | 3.28 %                     | 17.38 %       |
| 5.57 % – responded that service on machinery roads should be responsibility of who uses the road |                             |                            |                            |               |

Overall, it appears that respondents are primarily satisfied with the level of maintenance standards that are outlined in the current County Policy.

Respondents did note that environmental conditions, such as changing weather through the seasons, had a significant impact on road conditions and the amount that the road should be maintained. For example, grading frequency described in number of days, needs to be used as a guideline since it may not be reflective of the need to increase or decrease the service level based on weather conditions. Maintenance programs should be designed so that there is flexibility to address emergent needs and that the Policy should merely outline the minimum standards that should be met.

It was also noted that the County should ensure that road types identified matched the volume and weight of the traffic on the surfaces. Over time vehicles have changed and may be much larger now than the road was designed to accommodate. Respondents also expressed concerns over the need for there to be equitable maintenance programs, such as gravel applications, throughout the County. Although there are densely populated areas in the west end there is a need in the east end to ensure that people and products can get to their desired location.

In order to adequately plan maintenance and upgrades to the road network, including the financial implications, there is an opportunity for the County to develop a long-term transportation strategy to address overall infrastructure needs essential to rural economic development and agriculture sustainability. To complete this a yearly assessment of road conditions could be completed so that over time changes to the road network could be tracked. This should consider traffic conditions presently but also look at long-term projections to achieve a balanced approach.

In addition to weather and road type, another theme from respondent comments was the need to improve low areas on roads. A number of factors may be impacting these areas, such as deteriorating base and water pooling, and the County could investigate alternatives to repairing these, instead of just applying more gravel as a temporary repair. An overall identification and assessment of these areas would need to be completed to determine things like overall cost, safety concerns, connecting road network etc. Once this was completed a priority list could be incorporated into the road maintenance program. Respondents

noted that there may be willingness to have a small tax increase, if this was spent on repairing problem areas and addressing resident concerns.

When respondents were asked about if the County should be developing more local roads to become collector (feeder) roads, 44% of people said that this was not an important issue. 40% of respondents did agree though that, collector roads should be prioritized and upgraded as need to service the volume of traffic which they handle. Since a number of these roads support subdivision traffic it was noted that road standards and ongoing maintenance in subdivisions should be dealt with through the subdivision process prior to development occurring.

Comments were also received in regards to road infrastructure that is maintained by the Province. Since this is outside the jurisdiction of the municipality, could look at advocating to the Provincial government on behalf of its residents. There were three advocacy topics that emerged from the survey comments that included:

- Need for increased snow removal and sanding on highways – safety issue with the high volume of traffic some highways have
- Upgrades to some of the road network – Highway 870 (finish), Highway 855 or 857 due to increased volumes travelling to Vegreville or Camrose

Additional comments from respondents indicated that there was an opportunity for the County to look into:

- Updating or creating agreements between neighboring municipalities to ensure that maintenance and road rebuilding is consistent to address safety concerns for the travelling public
- Working collaboratively with urban and rural neighbors to share contractors for completing projects

To carry out any road maintenance program the County relies on its staff to efficiently and effectively carry out the programs and services as identified in policy by Council. Respondents had a number of positive comments regarding County staff and the job that gets accomplished under ever changing conditions. Operator training is an excellent opportunity for professional growth and ensures that current standards and technicians are employed in the delivery of services. Mentorship programs could be an excellent opportunity to share local knowledge of the road network as well as a training tool when delivery practices change or new equipment is deployed. Staff should be encouraged to continually upgrade their skills and knowledge base.

There is an opportunity for the County to increase communication with stakeholders about road maintenance programs and the work that is going to be completed. Respondents would like to be provided with more information about how to report a road issue, such as low areas, potholes etc.

By working more collaboratively with the stakeholders to address issues, the County can encourage open and productive dialogue, which in turn helps inform decision making at the Council level. Since the road network is a major budgetary item, the County needs to ensure that there is a framework in place for effective program delivery.

*Note: As part of the summary reporting, if there were any specific road locations identified by respondents, these were shared with the Public Works department for review and follow-up as needed.*

**PROGRAM AREA: Winter Maintenance**

The County has a Snow and Ice Clearing Level of Service Policy and the County is committed to maintaining its road network in the winter that ensures safety to the travelling public and manages snow removal and ice control on a priority basis.

Respondents were given an opportunity to rank road types based on priority after a snowfall event. The results indicated that the roads should be cleared in the following order: all bus routes, all major collector roads, all local roads, private driveways and then machinery roads. It was also noted that the current policy was adequate for the road priorities identified however people rely on the road network for various reasons and any ways to decrease the amount of time for snow removal is appreciated. Machinery roads are done on a request basis and the results indicated that this level of service was appropriate.

In the comments from the survey, there was discussion regarding washboard on roads and that snow is sometime left in driveway entrances. The County can use these points to review the winter maintenance program with operators and identify areas for improvement or challenges, such as speed when travelling and also necessary equipment for completing specific task.

With changing weather patterns, such as more rain and less snow, there might be an opportunity for the County to explore alternative delivery options for maintenance, which in turn could impact the timeframes for delivery. Of course, this means that there is need to be minimum standards that are established with flexibility to allocate extra resources as needed, given specific circumstances. Possible collaborations between neighboring municipalities could also be explored to streamline some program delivery, if there is a benefit to residents.

Overall, respondents appreciated the level of service that the County, and its operators, provided in regards to winter maintenance, noting that this is a rural municipality and it is important for residents to be aware of the road conditions and drive appropriately.

**PROGRAM AREA: Roadside Ditch Maintenance**

At the present time the County does not have an active roadside ditch maintenance program. The intent of a program like this would be to remove debris from roadside ditches and restore ditch contours to help with water management. Implementation of such a program would be a new initiative that would require resources, such as staff and finances and a policy to be developed.

Responses from the survey were mixed on whether the County should implement this program. There were a number of factors that were highlighted as contributing to the cause of this concern which included increased drainage from private land, driveway creation which impedes flow, decreased mowing, growth of brush species, and increased deposition and amount of gravel from the road surface. Other concerns were also raised in regards to the enforcement of excess drainage to roadside ditches and follow-up on processes that could be used for permitting or consulting with landowners when action is required.

If the County did want to explore this option it may warrant some further research to determine what other municipalities in the Province are doing in regards to this area. Respondents were clear however that if there was a program developed a tax increase should not be implemented to facilitate the program. Also, respondents encouraged the County to increase landowner awareness and education about this issue and the possible opportunities to work collaboratively, should policy allow for it.

**PROGAM AREA:           Shoulder Pulls**

Currently the County does not have a regular shoulder pull program included in the budget. In 2021 the County completed work on approximately 21 miles of gravel roads and is considering performing shoulder pulls on an annual basis as part of a road rehabilitation program.

67% of respondents to this portion of the survey indicated that yes, the County should re-instate this program because there are some roads that have lost their shape and this would be a proactive measure to extend the life of the road. From the additional comments, it was noted that this program does not apply County wide and should only be completed in areas that would benefit from the work, to extend the life of the road. In certain areas it may not be beneficial to complete a shoulder pull because the road structure may not be adequate or the width of the road may be compromised, limiting vehicle/equipment usage. Such a program may also apply more to high traffic, heavy load roads where the roads may need to be enhanced to support the vehicle use.

When respondents considered the cost for such a program to be added to the budget, responses were split on how it should be funded. If funds were to be spent on the program directly, respondents agreed that a small tax increase would be acceptable however other respondents felt that this program should be funded through the existing budget. An option that the County could pursue is looking for grant dollars to support the development of this program and complete work as funds are available.

Another opportunity for the County would be to consult with neighboring municipalities to see how they are handling this type of program.

**PROGAM AREA:           Road Rebuilding**

Road rebuilding has not been a program in the County since 2013 and it has recently come to Council's attention that this may be a possible program to reconsider. A program of this nature would involve rebuilding existing roads to improve grade, widen the road surface and generally upgrade and existing road. It is understood that maintenance is key to extending the life span of a road, however there are a number of factors that impact how programs are delivered across the County.

Survey respondents indicated that the County should consider some form of a program however the focus should be on roads that need spot repairs, rebuilding areas in low spots, and areas that may get saturated with water overtime causing deterioration. In many locations there are only short sections of road that need to be worked on and the whole road should not be rebuilt. By allocating funds to fix bad spots on multiple roads, respondents felt that many issues could be addressed versus a whole road rebuild in one area.

Some possible options that the County could consider, instead of a total road rebuilding program include:

- cost benefit analysis of projects to ensure that priority areas are targeted
- consider tendering and use of contractors for whole road rebuilds – that way there is no investment needed in specialized equipment
- closing roads that are in severe disrepair and the cost does not warrant a fix
- road that are designated as 'seasonal use' only - may be closed at certain times due to weather
- opportunity for increased training on innovative techniques for road repair
- work with neighboring municipalities on solutions that can benefit the region and possible alternatives to current practices that could be implemented



As with the shoulder pull program, a program of this nature should only be funded if there was grants or additional sources of revenue, aside from taxes, available to complete the work. The County could seek out opportunities that are available and advocate to the Province on the need for such grant programs to exist to assist municipalities with road rebuilding.

**PROGRAM AREA:       Hard Surfacing**

In recent years the County's hard surfacing program has focused on rehabilitating oiled road surfaces and with TerraCem and chip seal. In 2021, the County re-surfaced 7 miles of road and the County plans to hard surface 4 miles of road annually, however this is based on grant funding availability. In order to make more informed decisions Council wanted to ask questions in regards to the amount of hard surfacing completed, how it should be funded and the priority for such work.

Overall respondents agreed that hard surface roads are nice to drive on and help to increase aesthetics of an area however there was not a desire to increase the amount of hard surfaced roads throughout the County. Instead of expansion, the County should focus on maintaining the current hard surfaces, as it is a hard program to justify when other roads in the County need maintenance increased because they are impassable. When examining the multi-year road plan the County should identify areas that may benefit from hard surfacing and develop criteria, such as traffic volumes, to prioritize roads that may be the best fit.

There is an opportunity for the County to evaluate its hard-surfacing program to ensure that there is enough funding allocated to meet the desired outcomes for not only building of the road but maintenance as well. Using grant dollars or a local improvement tax was listed as the main ways respondents would like to see the County fund this program should it continue.

**PROGRAM AREA:       Dust Control**

Beaver County has a program where residents can apply to have dust control (calcium chloride) applied to the road surface in front of residential properties to suppress dust during the summer months. Over the past number of years this program has had some modifications made to it, including costs and application process, and Council was seeking input on these changes. There has been a concern raised that total costs for the application are not adequately covered and the cost share formula may need to be re-examined.

Approximately half of respondents agreed that, even if they weren't a direct user of the program, there was value to the program and it should be maintained. Respondents however were split on how the costs should be calculated for the application with a portion suggesting a 50-50 cost share while others suggested a full 100% recovery from those that use the program.

One of the opportunities for the County to explore would be the maintenance of the road surface after dust control is applied. Concerns were raised in regards to the washboard and pot holes that can develop when there is no grading done to the surface. The County could enquire with other municipalities about their programs and how these issues are address. There may also be alternate maintenance options that the County could test out to improve road surface condition in these application areas.

Overall this program area is well received and should be continued by the County with a combination County/User pay system.

**PROGRAM AREA:        Roadside Mowing**

Over the past number of years, the County has made changes to its mowing program and was seeking input from the public on the impact of those decisions. The current program ensures that all County roads west of Secondary Highway 834 in divisions 1 & 2, and hard surfaces roads in Divisions 3, 4, and 5 are mowed, which is approximately 400km. In 2021 additional miles were added to the program that amounted in approximately 100 km per year being mowed.

The roadside mowing program is ultimately part of an overall safety initiative to ensure that the road network in the County is safe for the travelling public. Respondents to the survey indicated that the current program is adequate, when done in a timely manner, and that there should be no tax increases, if modifications were made to the program.

The County should keep in mind the following items when considering making adjustments to this program:

- mowing increases visibility of wildlife in the ditch which is important for the safety of travelling vehicles
- it controls weeds in the ditch and also improves the aesthetics of an area
- helps to improve water flow in roadside ditches and off the road surfaces (no restrictions)
- mowing helps improve grading of the full road surface and proper crowning on the road

Also, when considering options for this program, Council should consider improving access for farmers to use roadsides when hay/feed supplies are short and also the environmental impacts that may be associated with mowing, such as the loss of bee habitat.

The County program is seen as an important safety issue and should be continued.

**PROGRAM AREA:        Selling Culverts**

The sale of culverts to landowners is a service that Beaver County provides to its residents since the number of culverts that the County purchases helps to reduce cost and transportation to the resident.

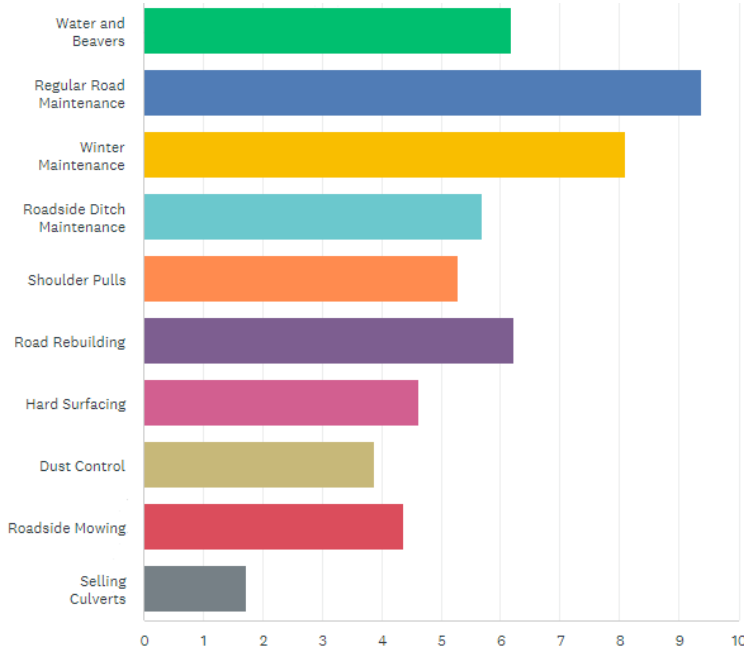
Although this program is not widely used, respondents to the survey said that the service should still be provided as it was a value to certain residents. In terms of the cost the survey indicated that the product cost of the culvert, plus a loading and administrative fee should be charged to those that use this service. As well, the County should be ensuring that it has enough culverts available to maintain its road network, so respondents agreed that a cap could be imposed to help with diminishing the supply.

When evaluating this program, it would be advisable for the County to look at costs for the service, possible environmental concerns such as culverts being used to drain land without permission, and also if there are any implications to local businesses if the County is in the retail business.

## CLOSING SUMMARY

Beaver County would like to thank everyone that participated in the public engagement process by completing the survey and providing feedback to Council and administration. There was an overwhelming response and Council is aware that the public is very interested in the programs and services that the County delivers. Stakeholder input will be beneficial to develop policies that reflect a balanced approach between fiscal restraints and appropriate level of service across the County.

Based on the information provided through the survey, respondents ranked the County program areas as having the following priority levels for which Council should focus their decision making:



Also, in closing there were a number of key trends that emerged from stakeholder comments that can assist the County moving forward in policy and program development. These included:

- increased resident communication with the County, specifically to address local needs and issues
  - o one solution that works in one area may need to be adjusted for another area
- increased cooperation between stakeholders in program delivery/implementation
- need to look at programs and services as proactive solutions, and seek out alternative options to help improve efficiency and effectiveness
- need for long-term planning and strategic direction to ensure that programs and services are sustainable and help to achieve the desired vision for the municipality
- continued advocacy on behalf of stakeholders on various issues, such as highways, provincial legislation changes and clarification of Provincial processes
- explore opportunities for alternative sources of revenue such as grants, changes to taxation models and using cost/benefit analysis when decision making

The information gathered through the public engagement process is an important tool, as it reflects the needs and concerns of local stakeholders. Council recognizes that good governance includes engaging County residents and municipal stakeholders and that there is a need for those stakeholders who are affected by a decision, to influence the decision.